



**Testimony Regarding House Bill 5255
House Committee on Natural Resources
Representative Andrea LaFontaine, Chair**

Submitted in writing by
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Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council
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Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, on behalf of its 2,500 plus members, wishes to express our support for House Bill 5255. This bill would ban net pen aquaculture operations within the Great Lakes and connecting waters.

As a means of introduction, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council is a nonprofit organization, based in Northern Michigan, whose purpose is to protect, restore, and enhance water resources, including our Great Lakes, inland lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater. We base all our programs on sound science and policy analysis, and have garnered respect for our work from local, state, and federal agencies, businesses, fellow environmental organizations, and citizens.

Because safeguarding our waters is paramount to our mission, we support a ban on commercial net-pen fish farms in the Great Lakes, to prevent disease, escapement and effluent risks that could harm the health of the Great Lakes, public health, and our economy.

After reviewing the reports put forth by the scientific advisory panel established by the Michigan departments of Natural Resources, Environmental Quality, and Agriculture and Rural Development, it is clear that establishing privately owned net-pen operations in public waters of the Great Lakes is not economically justifiable and poses too great of risk to our waters and public health.

The science panel's reports confirmed many of our concerns. It notes, for example, that the proposed net pen aquaculture facilities would:

- Dump untreated waste directly into the lakes, adding tons of phosphorus and nitrogen each year and potentially triggering toxic algae outbreaks like the one that shut down Toledo's drinking water source in 2014. There is currently no way to treat, or even monitor, the nutrient waste in the open waters of the Great Lakes.
- Provide a breeding ground for diseases that could spread from caged fish to wild populations, putting the Great Lakes fishery, a multi-billion dollar industry, and ecosystem at risk.

- Inevitably lead to escapes that can have wide-ranging negative genetic effects on native populations and erode our wild fish population's ability to adapt and survive.
- Lead to introductions of invasive species if non-native species are raised in the net pens.
- Disadvantage environmentally friendly aquaculture systems, since these responsible, self-contained projects must capture and treat the waste they produce, rather than dumping it untreated into a public water body for free.

We believe these risks are far too great for Michigan's most significant resource. Not only is net-pen aquaculture in the Great Lakes too much risk, but it comes with little to no reward for the people and waters of Michigan. According to the science panel reports, the proposed fish farms would produce at most 44 jobs. Michigan's recreational fishery—just one of many Great Lakes-dependent industries that commercial aquaculture would jeopardize—supports some 38,000 jobs and contributes \$4 billion to the economy each year.

In conclusion, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council believes that establishing privately owned net-pen operations in the public waters of the Great Lakes and connecting waters is not economically justifiable and poses far too great of risk to our waters and public health. As a result, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council fully supports HB 5255 to prohibit net pen aquaculture operations within the Great Lakes and connecting waters.

If we are going to maintain the proud heritage of the "Great Lakes State" and "Pure Michigan," we must remain vigilant in our efforts to protect our most valuable resource. We hope you will see that banning commercial aquaculture in the public trust waters of the Great Lakes is the best option for Michigan to ensure our Great Lakes remain fishable, swimmable, and drinkable for future generations. Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council urges you to support House Bill 5255.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions about the comments provided, please feel free to contact me at jenniferm@watershedcouncil.org or 231-347-1181.

Sincerely,



Jennifer McKay
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